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Firm Compiling Views on New UI Rec Center

By Mary Beth LaRue

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Project planners involved in the design of a new recreation center will begin the arduous task today of wading through approximately 2,000 student responses to an e-mail survey that could help determine the center's look and feel.

Brailsford and Dunlavey, a Washington, D.C.-based firm, designed the survey and will compile the results. Student feedback and the firm's focus groups will help in formulating a plan for the recreation center.

"I am glad the university is being proactive and seeking student opinion before making any decisions about a rec center," said UI Student Government President Nate Green. "I would encourage all students who have opinions about a rec center to fill out the online survey."

The 40-question survey includes questions on the amount of time a student would spend at the new center compared with the amount of time they spend at existing facilities.

In addition, the survey includes three renovation plans students can choose from.

Plan A includes Field House renovations plus a new East Side recreation center for an \$80-per-semester fee. Plan B would house all recreation facilities in one central location for a \$110-per-semester fee, while Plan C calls for no recreation-facility improvements and no change in the existing \$2-per-semester recreation fee.

A similar survey regarding a recreation center was sent to a random sample of UI students in 1999.

Those results found that "most students were willing to pay in the range of \$75 per semester to pay for a comprehensive facility," said Harry Ostrander, the director of Recreational Services.

Although Brailsford and Dunlavey predict only a 20 to 25 percent return from students, Ostrander is more optimistic.

"I am hoping for 30 to 40 percent," he said. "I do think there is a great deal of interest in this proposed project."

To make the rec center more "student friendly," planners are toying with ideas that could make it a student facility rather than a gym.

Many facilities built in the last five years include food courts, juice bars, lounges with large-screen TVs, meeting rooms, computer stations, and ATMs, Ostrander said.

"[Facilities] need to be more than just a place to exercise, and these above-mentioned amenities are needed to accomplish that objective," he said.

"The center will be universally accessible to students, and it will address the elements of nutrition, fitness, and wellness," said Phillip Jones, the UI vice president for Student Services. "We want to provide information regarding health, fitness, and recreation that will enhance the opportunity for skill-building and physical vigor.

"What we are really concerned about is helping the community improve health, fitness, and our aesthetic appreciation of life."

Once the plans are completed, Jones hopes the rec center will be completed in three years.

"We need to start as soon as possible so that this information remains valid and reliable," he said.

The next steps include using student input for site selection and seeking permission from the state Board of Regents, he said.